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ABSTRACT

This paper describes initial implementation of a new role in staff development--the Instructional Coach (IC). The IC acts as a resource at the school level to assist the principal and faculty to improve instructional practices. In a pilot project, one teacher from each of four schools within the Department of Defense Dependents Schools system (DoDDS), which serves eligible dependents of military and civilian personnel of the United States Government stationed abroad, was appointed to act as an IC for other teachers in the school, and to provide a range of services to improve instruction. The IC role is based on assumptions resulting from studies on collegial supervision including: (1) feedback is necessary for improvement; (2) teachers would like to have a supportive, non-evaluative person work with them in the classroom; (3) growth for instructional purposes may be more likely to happen via the IC with supportive skills rather than through the evaluative process; (4) reducing fragmentation is important in instruction; (5) classroom instruction should drive school improvement; (6) student achievement is the goal of the program; and (7) participation of the staff is voluntary. Selection criteria and specific duties for the IC are outlined. After selection, the ICs receive additional training in specific staff development programs as well as training in group leadership, group dynamics, meeting planning, information presentation, and peer coaching. The results from the pilot study were encouraging, with teachers, the ICs, and principals reporting that they were pleased with the program and found the position of IC useful. Two cautions were also mentioned: that training for ICs should be standardized and expanded, especially in facilitation and coaching roles; and that there are no data yet on the impact of the IC program on student achievement. (ND)

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The Instructional Coach: A New Role in Staff Development

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The Instructional Coach: A New Role in Staff Development

And some kind of help
Is the kind of help
That helpings all about.
And some kind of help
Is the kind of help
We all can do without.

Shel Silverstein, Where the Sidewalk Ends

Ask any good teacher how he or she came to be one. The response is predictable: someone special helped the novice or fledgling teacher learn the "tricks of the trade." These helping individuals are spoken of in tones of awe and gratitude.

How can these experiences be translated into common practice? How can all teachers be made better through the use of truly helpful interactions? Attempting to replicate this experience has resulted in a new program currently in effect in a large school system.

This paper describes the initial attempts to implement a new role in staff development: the Instructional Coach. The role is being piloted in four school within the Department of Defense Dependents Schools system. The concept is that one teacher from each school is appointed to act as an instructional coach for other teachers in the building, and in addition to provide a range of services leading to

improved instruction. The activities leading to the implementation of the program and preliminary results are discussed.

The Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS) is a school system that serves eligible dependents of military and civilian personnel of the United States Government stationed abroad. DoDDS' mission is to provide a high quality education that mirrors that of the finest school systems in the United States. Until recent military drawdowns occurred, DoDDS was the ninth largest school system in the United States. At present the system is compromised of approximately 212 schools located in 19 countries and includes elementary, middle and secondary schools, a community college, the Office of Dependents Schools headquarters (located in Arlington, Virginia) and 15 district superintendent offices. DoDDS employs approximately 10,000 teachers, specialists, administrators and support personnel.

The cultural as well as the educational makeup of the DoDDS schools is as diverse as one could imagine. The continuum ranges from those schools that have made no attempts to consistently help teachers improve to schools who have made concerted and successful attempts. The enormous task of increasing student achievement and impacting teacher behavior through staff development is exponentially compounded by the distance between the central administrative offices in Washington, DC, and each overseas school. Even within regions, travel from one school to another can take two days of airline travel. Add to these demographics a series of small, remote schools which have only two or three teachers and

approximately 15-30 students. The lack of commercial or university sponsored education courses or workshops overseas, even near military bases with a concentration of teachers, exacerbates the challenge. The system itself must deliver all staff development initiatives--often school-by-school, since in many locations schools are not close enough to share staff development resources. In 1989, a worldwide staff development program was instituted to insure that all teachers had an opportunity to study various teaching strategies and methodologies, but the basic question remained: how to help teachers more easily and effectively use the new strategies?

Supervision as a vehicle for helping teachers

The challenges provoked by this question led the staff development officers to examine various options to positively help teachers become more effective. The traditional vehicle of improving instruction, supervision, was examined historically to determine the context of "help" that had been traditionally sanctioned in the education profession during the course of the last 50 years-- the length of time that could be expected to circumscribe the longest teaching career.

The definition used for supervision was: feedback on performance designed to result in higher performance. Most educators, as well as other professionals, agree that feedback can result in higher performance. The key was identifying the type of feedback delivery which was effective.

The industrial model. In the post-war period (1940's-1960's) the predominant model used to provide feedback to teachers was the factory model, developed in the early years of the century (Bolin & Panaritis, 1992). The goals of teaching were clear: to make efficient use of time, to insure product replication (students who completed school able to read,write and perform mathematical computation) and quality control. Central office personnel were designated supervisors, insuring that the quality control was centralized rather than localized.

The industrial model was generally not seen as helpful by teachers. The use of central office personnel meant that the feedback given was formal rather than informal and based on the perceived needs of the district rather than on the teacher. Also, the visits were of necessity infrequent and timed to meet the needs of the supervisor rather than the teacher. Frequently the visits were also tied to evaluation reports of the teacher, thus resulting in high levels of anxiety which prohibited supervisors from being perceived as helpful.

The clinical model. In the 1960's a new model for supervision was developed and came to be known as clinical supervision (Goldhammer, 1980). This model drew heavily on the medical or psychological frame of improvement. In the clinical model, a preconference is held to establish the targeted objectives and lay out what the teacher hopes to accomplish in the lesson. Next, a trained observer watches the lesson. Finally, a postconference is held in which the observer gives feedback about the perceived positive and negative actions the teacher made in reaching targeted

objectives. The goals of the clinical supervision model were: continuous professional growth, since conferences were designed based on the skill level of the teacher; a common professional vocabulary; and an increase in teacher self-esteem resulting from the "clinical" rather than factory approach. Unlike the industrial model, the building level administrators were those most likely to be trained in clinical supervision, since they presumably could do more of the intensive pre- and post-conferencing required.

Like the previous model, the clinical supervision model foundered on two points. First, building administrators felt that they did not have the time necessary to perform frequent observations; secondly, they retained their role as evaluators of the teachers and it was almost impossible for teachers to be receptive to clinical feedback from those who would also judge the quality of their performance. This problem exacerbated as school systems in the 1970's and 80's experimented with salary increases or rewards (merit pay) based on observed performance.

Collegial supervision. In the beginning of the 1980's, researchers such as Showers (1980) and Mohlman (1981) reported success using teachers to coach each other in using new instructional strategies. Though the amount of feedback varied, those treatments in which teachers studied new instructional strategies, talked about their use of the strategies, and observed one another teach seemed consistently to result in actual change in teacher behavior. The goals of this type of "supervision" were: authentic and practical feedback regarding strategies that had been studied, and

above all the immediate transfer of learning from training sessions to the classroom. A key difference in this type of feedback was that it was performed by peers and had no evaluative component. Joyce, Showers and Murphy (1989) have reported the clear effectiveness of this strategy in producing change in teacher behavior which has led to improved student achievement.

Creating the role of the Instructional Coach

It was the body of research from the collegial model which led to the creation of a new role in the DoDDS schools as part of its staff development effort. The title of the role was the Instructional Coach (IC) and the definition of the role is as follows:

> The Instructional Coach is an educator who acts as a resource at the school level to assist the principal and the faculty with efforts to improve instructional practices, for the purpose of improving student learning.

The role is based on certain assumptions that have resulted from the studies on collegial supervision:

1. For improvement to occur, people need feedback.

2. Teachers would like to have a supportive, non-evaluative person work with them in the implementation of their classroom duties.

3. Growth for instructional purposes may be more likely to happen via the instructional coach with supportive skills rather than through the evaluative process.

4. Reduction of fragmentation is an important asset in the total process of

instruction.

5. School improvement should be driven by the perspective of classroom instruction.

6. Student achievement is the goal of the program.

7. Participation of the staff is voluntary; encouraged but not mandated.

To begin the program, schools in the DoDDS system were offered the opportunity to participate in a pilot project in which they would have one instructional coach in each school. Four schools in the Mediterranean Region volunteered.

To initiate the program, it was decided that the IC position would be a half-time classroom position with the remainder of the time allotted for other duties. Thus the IC would be seen as a peer, since (s)he would have a classroom for half of the day. Specific duties were defined for the IC, and included:

-Provide information about the IC program to the staff and the community

-Provide inservice training for faculty and perhaps to parents

-Act as a peer coach, conducting at least three classroom observation and feedback sessions per day

-Arrange and conduct study groups

-Arrange and schedule peer observations

-Facilitate peer coaching activities by covering classes for peer observations

-Serve on school improvement teams and other school-based committees

-Seek out and distribute current educational research

-Coordinate building-level improvement efforts

-Document progress of IC program.

Selection of Instructional Coaches.

A key factor in the success of the program was seen as the selection of the IC. The principal was given the task of selecting the IC, and a number of criteria were generated to direct the selection. It was determined that the IC should be:

-Extensively trained in instructional methodologies, including the Study of Teaching (the DoDDS staff development initiative)

-Respected by staff and community, both personally and professionally

-Genuinely interested and concerned with student learning

-A risk-taker with a healthy ego

-A self-starter with a sense of humor

-Experienced and knowledgable about presenting to adults

-Articulate, with strong intra- and interpersonal skills

-An exemplary classroom teacher.

After selection, the IC would receive additional training in specific staff development programs as well as training in group leadership, group dynamics, planning meetings, presenting information, peer coaching, and so forth. This training would be provided by both in-house and external consultants.

Preliminary Results

The results from the first-year pilot survey are encouraging. It is clear that the IC is performing the tasks that are consistent with the program goals. A day that was logged by one high school IC included the following: a twenty-minute conference with administrators on the knowledge base of instruction (in this case, the concept of proximity); a 55 minute demonstration lesson in a biology class illustrating cooperative learning techniques; four 10-12 minute observations, followed by two mini-

conferences and two full-fledged feedback sessions, one of which occurred after school; Xeroxed and distributed to entire staff a two-page article on authentic assessment; acted as a substitute for one teacher who then participated in a peer coaching observation; met with the School Improvement Program chair to discuss progress on the SIP plan; created a bulletin board in the main hallway which targeted the purposes of instructional excellence; attended the opening portion of a study group which the IC had orchestrated (food, flyers, set-up, etcetera.)

An informal survey has been administered to teachers, principals and Instructional Coaches during this first year of implementation. Teachers and ICs report that they are pleased with the program, and teachers indicate that they have indeed been helped by the IC. Principals report that they are pleased to have someone in the building that is not seen as an evaluator but who can help improve instruction. The fear that teachers would not trust the IC has proved unfounded, probably because of the voluntary nature of all IC interactions. Nor did principals feel that the IC was preempting their role; in fact, the most positive reactions have come from building administrators.

Cautions

The one factor that is repeatedly stated as being a possible barrier to success is the importance of staff development training for the IC. Few IC's have reported feeling insecure in their pedagogical knowledge, but many feel the need for more training in facilitation and coaching roles. The training for IC's will have to be standardized and expanded.

Another caution is evident. Although survey results reflect the fact that faculty and administrators like the program and feel good about it, the ultimate goal is increased student achievement. Student achievement data must be collected at all pilot sites in

addition to more data collection on the actual and perceived functioning of the IC. It is estimated that it will be several years before a pattern of increased achievement is discernible, if indeed it appears.

Summary

Despite its fledgling status, the Instructional Coach seems to be a logical outgrowth of the most recent research in teacher change. Early reports on the willingness of teachers to learn from peer feedback are encouraging. As currently practiced, the IC in the pilot schools in DoDDS offers a truly innovative way for teachers to improve performance.

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